

# Agency Strategic Plan

## Department of Veterans' Services

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### Agency Mission, Vision, and Values

#### **Mission Statement:**

The Department of Veterans Services' serves Virginia's veterans and their beneficiaries by ensuring they receive the benefits, support, quality care, and recognition they have earned through service and sacrifice.

#### **Agency Vision:**

Become the benchmark for the delivery of quality veterans programs at the state level and help assure Virginia veterans receive the federal benefits to which they are entitled

#### **Agency Values:**

- **Service**  
Deliver the best service possible to Virginia's veterans – they deserve no less
- **Dedication**  
Bring an unflinching commitment to helping all of Virginia's veterans
- **Excellence**  
Continually strive to be the best at what we do
- **Involvement**  
Involve all stakeholders – veterans, veterans service organizations, department staff, policy makers, and legislators – in developing and implementing top flight veterans programs
- **Innovation**  
Constantly seek new and/or better ways to reach Virginia's veterans and deliver services
- **Openness and honesty**  
Deal with all stakeholders in a direct and sincere manner
- **Responsibility and Accountability**  
Create a climate of ownership at the lowest level possible
- **Flexibility**  
Encourage our front-line managers to use their initiative and experience to accomplish the mission

### Agency Executive Progress Report

#### **Current Service Performance**

The development of this strategic plan represents the first time the Department of Veterans Services has created a unifying document to chart the course of the department. Five Service Area Plans – one for each of the department's five service sections – support the department's strategic plan. Each Service Area Plan features newly-developed objectives, measures, and strategies that support the department's goals.

As part of the ongoing strategic planning process, the department will develop objectives, measures, and strategies that support the agency's five goals. In Fiscal Year (FY) 06, the department will begin collecting the data required to measure progress towards each goal.

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### **Productivity**

The Department of Veterans Services began operations as a unified agency on July 1, 2003. The subsequent two years of operation have been marked by budget shortfalls, staffing shortages, and upheaval. An improved department budget, the hiring of new staff members, support from the executive and legislative branches, and hard-won operational experience have helped start the department on the road to recovery.

The department's FY06 General Fund authorization was increased by over \$1 million during the 2005 budget and legislative sessions. The budget increase has enabled the department to fill positions, particularly in the Benefit Services section, that have gone unfilled due to a lack of funds. The budget increase will also allow the department to deploy six additional Veterans Service Representatives, providing increased access and service for Virginia's veterans.

The budget increase will also allow the department to hire new employees at Virginia's two state-operated veterans cemeteries. While the number of burials rose last year at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery, located in Amelia, it was the opening of the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery, located in Suffolk, which spurred the sharp rise in the number of burial services performed – from 179 in FY04 to 443 in FY05.

### **Major Initiatives and Related Progress**

DVS has initiatives underway to improve access to services for Virginia's veterans, including:

- Operations began at the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in December 2004, with 255 burials conducted between December 13, 2004 and June 30, 2005. The department has requested capital funds to construct a third state-owned veterans cemetery in Southwest Virginia
- The department will open six new benefit field offices in FY06, providing Virginia veterans with greater access to veterans services
- Construction will begin in 2005 on the Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center (SBVCC), to be built on the grounds of the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond

### **Virginia Ranking and Trends**

- With approximately 750,000 veterans, Virginia's veterans population is the 11th largest in the nation
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) spending in Virginia totaled almost \$1.8 billion in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 04, 10th in the nation

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### **Customer Trends and Coverage**

- Benefit Services: 117,764 veterans served out of a potential 750,000
- Care Center Services (nursing care): 61,292 patient days out of a potential 65,700
- Care Center Services (assisted living): 20,558 patient days out of a potential 21,900
- Cemetery Services: 443 burials performed out of a potential 2,237
- State Approving Agency for Veterans Education: 17,036 veterans served out of a potential 24,507
- State Approving Agency for Veterans Education: 525 School Certifying Officials served out of a potential 727

Anticipated changes in customer base

- While Virginia's overall veterans population is declining, the hiring of new Veterans Service Representatives and the opening of new benefits field offices will provide greater access to benefits services
- The customer base for Virginia's veterans cemeteries is increasing. Increased utilization of the Virginia Veterans Cemetery and the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery is expected in FY06
- The opening of the Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center in 2007 will increase the number of beds at state-operated veterans care centers from 240 to 400

### **Future Direction, Expectations, and Priorities**

With the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs facing a potential budget shortfall of over \$1 billion, state departments of veterans affairs will increasingly be called on to fill the void between the federal government and veterans. Employees of the Benefit Services section serve as skilled advocates for Virginia's veterans, helping them access the benefits, predominantly available from the federal government, to which they are entitled. With the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the activation of many National Guard and Reserve units, the Commonwealth's citizens will look to the department to serve the needs of the Virginia men and women who serve our country and Commonwealth.

### **Impediments**

Some of the impediments to serving Virginia's veterans were removed during the 2005 budget/legislative process, when the department's General Fund authorization was increased by just over \$1 million, and the department received authorization and funding for new positions. The lack of benefit field offices in Northern Virginia has impeded the department's ability to serve veterans in that part of the state, but steps are being taken to identify and secure offices for two Veterans Service Representatives.

Prior to the opening of the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in December 2004, the department was impeded in its efforts to meet the burial needs of veterans in the Hampton Roads/Tidewater region. That impediment has been removed, but the department must continuously monitor the workload at the Horton Cemetery to ensure that staffing levels are commensurate with the cemetery's workload, so that staffing shortages do not impede service delivery.

The opening of the Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center in 2007 will increase the department's ability to serve the long-term care needs of Virginia's veterans, particularly those residing in the Richmond area.

## **Agency Background Information**

### **Statutory Authority**

- Education Program Certification for Veterans

Title 38 (Veterans Benefits) of the U.S. Code is the basis for the approval and supervision of courses offered by qualified educational institutions and/or training establishments in accordance with the standards and provisions as follows:

- Chapter 30 establishes the Montgomery GI Bill for veterans separated from active duty and honorably

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discharged, having entered active duty after June 30, 1985

- Chapter 32 institutes the Veterans Educational Assistance Program for veterans entering active duty between January 1, 1977 and June 30, 1985
- Chapter 34, known as the Vietnam Era GI Bill, provides vocational readjustment and restores lost educational opportunities to those service men and women whose careers have been interrupted or impeded by reason of active duty after January 31, 1955
- Chapter 35 covers the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program, providing education and training opportunities to eligible dependents of veterans who are permanently and totally disabled due to a service-related condition, or who died while on active duty or as a result of a service-related condition
- Chapter 36 defines and provides guidelines for the administration of educational benefits as governed by the State Approving Agency

Title 10, Chapter 1606 of the U.S. Code made available educational programs for veterans of the Selected Reserve including the Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, Air Force Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve and Coast Guard Reserve, and the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard

Federal Contract No. V101 (223B) P-4562 prescribes governing directives for administration of the State Approving Agency as agreed upon by the United States of America, Department of Veterans Affairs and the Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Veterans Services

- **Veterans Care Center Operations**

Title 2.2, Chapter 20, § 2.2-2000 through 2.2-2004 of the Code of Virginia provides for the operation of the Virginia Veterans Care Center under the Department of Veterans Services.

The Virginia Veterans Care Center is comprised of a 180-bed Skilled Nursing Facility and a 60-bed Assisted Living Facility, operated under licenses from the Virginia Department of Health and the Virginia Department of Social Services, respectively.

- **Case Management Services for Veterans Benefits**

Title 2.2, Chapter 20 provides for the establishment of a Department of Veterans Services and the appointment of a Commissioner of Veterans Services. It outlines the administrative responsibilities of the department and the general and additional powers of the Commissioner.

Title 23, Chapter 1, provides for the waiver of tuition and required fees for certain students as part of the Virginia War Orphan Education Program. The Department of Veterans Services administers the program and determines program eligibility.

Title 38 U.S. Code of Federal Regulations is the basis for the adjudication of claims for benefits by veterans, their dependents and their beneficiaries.

- **Administrative and Support Services**

Title 2.2, Chapter 20 provides for the establishment of a Department of Veterans Services and the appointment of a Commissioner of Veterans Services. It outlines the administrative responsibilities of the department and the general and additional powers of the Commissioner.

- **State Veterans Cemetery Management and Operations**

Title 2.2, Chapter 20 provides for the establishment of a Department of Veterans Services and the appointment of a Commissioner of Veterans Services. It outlines the administrative responsibilities of the department, which

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include the establishment, operation, administration, and maintenance of cemeteries for veterans owned and operated by the Commonwealth.

### **Customer Base:**

<b>Customer Description</b>	<b>Served</b>	<b>Potential</b>
Administrative Services Section: Department of Veterans Services personnel (internal customers)	307	307
Benefit Services Section: Veterans, Eligible Spouses, and Dependents	117,764	750,000
Care Center Services Section: Assisted Living (Domiciliary Care) measured in hours of care	20,558	21,900
Care Center Services Section: Nursing Care measured in hours of care	61,292	65,700
Cemetery Services Section: Veterans, Eligible Spouses and Dependents	443	2,237
State Approving Agency for Veterans Education: Eligible Veterans and Dependents	17,036	24,507
State Approving Agency for Veterans Education: Military Education Service Officers	2	20
State Approving Agency for Veterans Education: School Certifying Officials	525	727

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### **Anticipated Changes In Agency Customer Base:**

- Education Program Certification for Veterans

It is difficult to accurately anticipate potential changes to the SAA customer base due to the 10-year delimiting rule, which allows veterans to utilize their education benefits up to 10 years after separating from the military

Because of past trends, SAA anticipate a high turnover in certifying officials at educational/training facilities

- Veterans Care Center Operations

The Virginia Veterans Care Center measures the number of customers served and service capacity in terms of "patient days." A patient day is one patient occupying a bed at the VVCC for one day. Service capacity is measured in this way because the VVCC experiences a continuous turnover of patients. While some patients may stay in the VVCC for several months, other patients may only stay in the VVCC for a few days. The patient day measure provides a quantifiable measure of actual vs. potential service capacity of the VVCC.

With 240 beds, the VVCC has a capacity of 87,600 patient days (240 beds X 365 days = 87,600). The nursing care units, with 180 beds, have a potential capacity of 65,700 patient days, while the assisted living unit, with 60 beds, has a potential capacity of 21,900 patient days.

The nursing care units provided a total of 61,292 patient days of care in FY05, meaning that over 93% of the nursing care unit's capacity ( $61,292 \div 65,700$ ) was achieved in FY05. On an average day, 168 out of 180 beds were in use.

The assisted living unit provided a total of 20,558 patient days of care in FY05, meaning that over 94% of the assisted living unit's capacity ( $20,558 \div 21,900$ ) was achieved in FY05. On an average day, 54 out of 60 beds were in use.

The Commonwealth currently has a service capacity of 240 beds – all of it at the Virginia Veterans Care Center. As Virginia's only state-owned and operated veterans care center, the VVCC serves veterans from across the Commonwealth, but draws the majority of its residents from within 50 miles of the Roanoke area. The planned construction of a new veterans care center in Richmond and the possible construction of a veterans care center in Hampton Roads have the potential to triple the capacity of Virginia's veterans care centers to 720 beds in the next decade.

Options to provide nursing care and assisted living care to more of Virginia's veterans include:

- Increasing the service capacity of the VVCC
- Constructing new veterans care centers in other parts of the Commonwealth
- Encouraging the federal government to fund the construction and operation of additional federally-operated skilled care and long-term care facilities in Virginia
- Lobbying the federal government for increased funding for care of veterans at private skilled care or long-term care facilities

The department is already pursuing the second course of action. Construction will begin in 2005 on the Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center (SBVCC), on the grounds of the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond. The SBVCC will open in 2007 as a 160-bed skilled care facility. Originally planned for 240 beds, 80 beds had to be cut due to mounting construction costs. The department will request funding from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) to cover 65% of the project costs to restore the 80 beds. The Commonwealth of Virginia has already authorized a treasury loan in the amount of \$2.8 million to cover the state's 35% share of the \$8 million addition.

The 2005 General Assembly authorized \$50,000 to conduct a planning study on a third veterans care center in the Hampton Roads area. The department has requested funding approval for a third care center as part of its 2006-

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2012 Capital Budget request. As noted above, the construction of a new care center is contingent upon the receipt of federal funding for 65% of the project costs. The state is responsible for the remaining 35%.

Title 38, Chapter 1, Part 59, Section 59.40 of the Code of Federal Regulations states that Virginia may apply for federal grant money – 65% of construction costs – to build/operate veterans care center facilities with a maximum of 1,312 total beds. If the number of existing beds (240 – at the VVCC), planned beds (240 – at the SBVCC), and potential beds (240 – at a care center in Hampton Roads) are subtracted from the 1,312 maximum, then Virginia would still have a potential shortfall of 592 beds.

Building a new veterans care center is dependent on more than the maximum number of allowed beds or on the availability of construction money. New care centers must serve a large enough market to be economically viable. In other words, they must be located such that there are a sufficient number of veterans living in close enough proximity to the care center to maintain the occupancy rate needed for cost-efficient service delivery. In addition, placing new care centers in close proximity to VA Medical Centers greatly facilitates access to the VA Health Care system, and allows for some cost savings through shared services (laundry, food preparation, etc.). There are three VA Medical Centers in Virginia, in Hampton, Richmond, and Salem.

- Case Management Services for Veterans Benefits

Note: Due to the difficulty estimating the number of eligible spouses and dependents, the analysis of anticipated changes to the service area customer base will focus on the number of eligible veterans.

Veterans face no statute of limitations when applying (filing) for federal compensation and pension benefits. Similarly, veterans currently receiving benefits related to one claim face no barriers to filing a claim for a second (or subsequent) service-connected disability. The absence of a statute of limitations means that any veteran may file a claim at any time in his or her life. Thus, the eligible customer base for benefit services is the current veterans' population, and Virginia's veteran population is declining.

An analysis of United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) population data suggests that the number of "new" Virginia veterans being created – whether by separation from military service, retirement, or migration of veterans from other states – is exceeded by the number of Virginia veterans who pass away each year. This results in a net decline in Virginia's veterans' population.

An analysis of Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2004 (October 2003 – September 2004) is illustrative. The USDVA estimate of the veterans population – VetPop2001Adj – prepared in September 2002, forecast that 15,725 Virginia veterans would pass away in FFY 2004. During the same period, the USDVA forecast that 6,668 service members would separate from active duty in Virginia, and that Virginia would realize a gain of 803 veterans through migration from other states. Adding these numbers together can produce a forecast of the number of "new" veterans residing in Virginia in FFY2004 – 7,471. If the numbers of "new" veterans is subtracted from the number of veterans who were forecast to pass away, Virginia "lost" 8,254 veterans in FFY 2004. In other words, Virginia was forecast to have 8,254 fewer veterans at the end of FFY2004 than at the end of FFY2003. Comparable numbers for FFY2003 and FFY2002 show a forecast loss of 8,433 and 8,722 veterans, respectively.

The USDVA study forecasts a "loss" of 8,291 Virginia veterans in FFY2005. This "loss rate" is forecast to increase through FFY2015, when Virginia is forecast to lose 9,851 veterans. The loss rate is then forecast to decline through FFY2030, when Virginia is forecast to lose 8,745 veterans a year. The USDVA forecasts that Virginia will have 508,253 veterans in FFY2030, a decline in Virginia's veteran population of 230,092 veterans in the next quarter century.

Examining the age of Virginia's veterans and their period of service helps make sense of the shrinking veterans' population. At the end of FFY2005, 66% of Virginia's veterans were forecast to be age 50 and older. The death rate among Virginia veterans is a factor of this aging veteran population. The USDVA forecast that 15,664

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Virginia veterans aged 50 and older would pass away in FFY2005, while only 402 veterans younger than age 50 would die.

Veterans aged 50 and older are also a significant consideration when examining period of service. If one assumes that the youngest of the Vietnam War era veterans were 18 in 1973, then these veterans would be aged 50 in 2005. Vietnam War-era veterans were expected to number over 226,000, or 31 % of Virginia's veterans' population. Approximately 74,000 World War II era veterans were forecast to reside in Virginia – just under 10% of Virginia's veteran population. Korean War-era veterans were forecast to number just over 62,000 (approximately 8% of the veteran population) and veterans who served in multiple conflicts – WWII and Korea, Korea and Vietnam, WWII, Korea, and Vietnam, Vietnam and the Gulf War – add another 53,000 veterans to the mix – 7% of Virginia's veterans. In addition to those with wartime service, over 68,000 peacetime veterans served between World War II and the Korean War or between the Korean and Vietnam Wars – or approximately 9% of Virginia's veterans' population.

Despite an aging veteran population, the demand for assistance in filing for veterans' benefits remains strong, even from veterans who left military service 30 or more years ago. As discussed above, any veteran may file a claim at any time in his or her life. Some veterans will wait for many years after leaving military service to file for service-connected disability benefits. Several factors could explain this phenomenon. A medical condition may only manifest itself years after the initial event – and the veteran may only realize that the condition was service-connected at a much later date. Awareness of and access to claims assistance could play a role. Some veterans who may at first have been reluctant to file for compensation for a service-connected disability – “I was only doing my job” – will file for benefits years later when economic hardship means a compensation payment is the difference between a livable retirement and poverty. All of these factors, and many more, mean that veterans will use the services of the Benefit Services section at any time in their lives. Waiting to file a claim, however, makes the process more complicated.

Establishing a casual link between a veterans' current state of health and the service-connected event that caused the condition for which compensation is sought is much easier if the veteran files the claim immediately upon or shortly after leaving military service. The longer he or she waits after leaving military service to file the claim, the harder it is to prove this link. Medical records that were readily available at separation must be retrieved from the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC). Supporting evidence – discharge paperwork, citations, after action reports, etc. – must be gathered to support the claim for service-connected disability.

NOTE: The above analysis does not take into account the vast current and potential customer base represented by the dependents and beneficiaries of Virginia's veterans, as such data was not readily available. While it may be difficult or even impossible to estimate the number of beneficiaries and dependents who are receiving benefits or who will be entitled to receive benefits in the future, this is a large and an important segment of the department's customer base. Survivors' benefits include Dependency and Indemnity Compensation for the spouse, dependent parents, and children. Also available is a Death Pension that is income based but is available to the surviving spouse and children of veterans who meet the requirements established in Title 38 Code of Federal Regulations. In addition, the spouse and children of a 100% permanent and total disabled veteran or of a veteran who dies because of a service-connected death may qualify for education benefits. These dependent benefits greatly increase the department's actual and potential customer bases.

While the veteran population is projected to decrease, the dependents population will do so at a slower rate. The vast majority of World War II and Korean War veterans are male. Since women live longer than men, the veteran's spouses can be expected to out live them by several years. Thus, the total customer base will decrease at a slower rate than the over all veteran population in Virginia.

- **Administrative and Support Services**

With the opening of the Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center in Richmond in FY07 or FY08, the Administrative



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Services section's customer base will expand to include the additional healthcare staff necessary to operate a 160-bed facility. An 80-bed addition is expected to open in FY08 or later, which will further increase the number of healthcare staff.

A study funded by the 2005 General Assembly will determine if a third veterans care center is needed in the Hampton Roads area. If warranted, the construction of a third center, likely beginning in FY10 or later, will further expand the employee level for the Department of Veterans Services.

It is also possible that a third veterans cemetery will be built in Southwest Virginia in FY08 or later. This will have minimal impact on the overall employee level for the Department, adding an estimated five to seven full-time positions. As more customers are served at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery and the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery, it is possible that additional staff could be added. Again, the impact on Administrative Services will be minimal, especially as compared to the opening of a new veterans care center. Other possible changes include the addition of staff to the Benefit Services section and the State Approving Agency for Veterans Education. These numbers should be relatively small, with a small impact on the Administrative Services section.

All told, it is expected that the employment level will increase by approximately 500 employees over the four-year period outlined above.

- **State Veterans Cemetery Management and Operations**

The USDVA forecasts that the number of Virginia veterans who pass away each year is forecast to increase through FFY2015, reaching a peak of 17,799 a year before declining to 16,374 by FFY2030. If this prediction holds true, the Customer Base for Virginia's veterans cemeteries should meet or exceed current base levels for the next 25 years.

If a third state-operated veterans cemetery were constructed in Southwest Virginia, in the Dublin area, for example, it would have the potential to serve approximately 65,000 of the 104,000 Virginia veterans who do not currently live within 75 miles of a state or national veterans cemetery

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### **Agency Products and Services:**

#### **Current Products and Services**

- Education Program Certification for Veterans

#### Approval of programs:

Review, evaluate, and approve programs of education and training offered by educational institutions, businesses, and industries to veterans and their dependents that qualify for assistance under the various GI bills

#### Supervision of schools and training establishments:

Visit facilities to review compliance with criteria and requirements, initiate corrective actions, and submit reports and follow up, if necessary

#### Technical Assistance:

Provide direct assistance to facilities requesting approval through visits and participation in regional certifying official training workshops

#### Outreach:

Provide information to veterans and educational programs through participation in Supermarket of Veterans Benefits events, job fairs, Transition Assistance Program (TAP) briefings, and through the development and distribution of promotional materials and publications

#### Liaison:

Collaborate with other education and training professionals to promote and encourage exchanges of information to support and raise awareness of the veterans educational benefits programs

- Veterans Care Center Operations

The Virginia Veterans Care Center provides long term care and rehabilitation to honorably discharged veterans in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Specific services include:

#### Assisted Living Services:

Provides care for residents needing assistance with a limited number of activities of daily living, medication administration, and/or monitoring of behavior patterns.

#### Nursing Care Services:

Provides care for residents needing assistance with multiple activities of daily living, administration of medication and treatments by a licensed nurse, and monitoring of behavior or changes in medical condition.

#### Skilled Care Services:

Provides care for residents requiring daily observation or treatment by a licensed nurse, physical therapist, occupational therapist, or speech language therapist.

#### Alzheimer's/Dementia Care Services:

Provides safe supportive environment for residents with dementia who also require nursing care services. The care environment is designed to allow wandering within the unit and outside wandergarden but prevent elopement.

- Case Management Services for Veterans Benefits

#### Assistance:

Assist veterans, their dependents and beneficiaries in completing applications for benefits from the

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USDVA. Assist with the development of evidence to support all claims

### **Representation:**

Provide representation in the appeals process. This includes assistance in the preparation of written arguments and personal representation during hearings at the USDVA Regional Office in Roanoke and before the Board of Veterans Appeals in Washington, D.C.

### **Dissemination:**

Disseminate information regarding veterans' benefits through a variety of means, including the agency's website and newsletter

### **Education:**

Inform Virginia's veterans about the services offered by the department through presentations at meetings of veterans service organizations and civic organizations

### **Virginia War Orphan Education Program:**

Inform veterans, high school guidance counselors, and college financial aid coordinators about the eligibility and availability of the Virginia War Orphan Education Program. Administer the Virginia War Orphan Education Program.

### **• Administrative and Support Services**

The Administrative Services section provides multiple services to the department's four service-delivery sections, including budget preparation and financial reporting, accounts payable and accounts receivable, payroll processing, procurement of goods and services, recording of assets and inventory control, and all functions associated with human resources such as recruitment and selection, employee evaluations, position classification and compensation, grievance processing, and administration of benefits plans

The offices of the Commissioner and Chief Deputy Commissioner provide the leadership and guidance necessary for effective department operations. Employees in these offices provide staff assistance to the Board of Veterans Services, the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations, the Veterans Services Foundation, and the Veterans Care Center Advisory Committee

### **• State Veterans Cemetery Management and Operations**

Virginia's veterans cemeteries offer the following services at no charge to eligible veterans and for a fee, currently \$300, to eligible spouses or dependents:

- Interment in a ground plot of casketed remains, or the columbarium or ground inurnment for cremated remains
  - The opening and closing of a gravesite
  - Through the USDVA, a grave marker, with inscription
  - Placement of the grave marker
  - Perpetual care of the gravesite

Casketed gravesites are identified with authorized markers based on the types available at each cemetery (marble at the cemetery in Amelia, granite at the cemetery in Suffolk)

Cremated remains are buried or inurned at the cemeteries in the same manner and with the same honors as casketed remains. Ground inurnments are marked with flat gray granite markers at both cemeteries, while above ground (columbarium) inurnments are marked by an inscribed niche cover (marble at the cemetery in Amelia, granite at the cemetery in Suffolk)

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Spouses and eligible dependents may be buried in the same grave as the veteran, with other burial benefits (opening and closing of the gravesite, perpetual care, etc.) being the same as for the veteran. Virginia's veterans cemeteries charge a fee for the burial of a spouse or dependent, equal to the reimbursement amount received for eligible veterans. As of July 1, 2005, this was \$300.

Each veteran and family member must provide his or her own concrete vault or liner. Vault arrangements are made with a funeral director at the time funeral services are being arranged.

Upon being contacted concerning the death, cemetery representatives coordinate the collection of all appropriate paperwork. All forms are assembled, verified, and entered in the Burial Operation Support System (BOSS) computer program for space assignment and in preparation for ordering of the requested grave marker.

Cemetery representatives schedule the funeral service time and date with the applicable funeral home and family representative. Family members may visit the cemetery prior to the burial if they wish.

On the day of the scheduled service, cemetery representatives meet the funeral procession as it enters the cemetery gates. Cemetery representatives guide the funeral party through the funeral service, a very emotional period that often lasts an hour or more.

Grounds personnel work diligently to ensure the cemetery is maintained to the highest standards. Grave/cremation sites are laid out, verified, opened, and closed daily. Grass, trees, and mulch beds are continually maintained to ensure that the best possible landscape appearance is presented.

### **Factors Impacting Agency Products and Services**

- Education Program Certification for Veterans  
Insufficient number of educational specialists to certify and accredit all eligible learning centers operating in the Commonwealth of Virginia

SAA has identified 727 potential facilities

SAA currently manages 525 active facilities with four educational specialists (three full-time, one part-time)

USDVA guidelines call for one full-time specialist for every 50 facilities. This would equate to 10.5 positions to manage the current workload and 14.5 positions to manage the potential workload

- Veterans Care Center Operations

Resident Census:

While the Virginia Veterans Care Center draws clients from across the Commonwealth, the majority of VVCC residents are admitted from the Salem VA Medical Center, adjacent to the VVCC, and from hospitals in the Roanoke area. The VVCC must maintain strong ties with veterans service organizations and strive to establish an ongoing public awareness to ensure that veterans not only become aware of VVCC services, but also to ensure that the families of the veterans are knowledgeable about this health care resource available to their veteran family member.

Admissions are dependant to a large degree on the rate and length of stay in area hospitals. Of the discharges from the hospitals, only discharged patients who are honorably discharged veterans residing in Virginia are considered for admission to the VVCC. Care Center residents requiring hospitalization must be discharged from the VVCC, but care and consideration is made to try to readmit these former VVCC residents following their hospital stay.

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Given that the Virginia Veterans Care Center does not receive a General Fund appropriation from the General Assembly, the facility must maintain a strong census to ensure an adequate revenue stream to remain viable and not to become a fiscal burden to the Commonwealth.

### **Staffing:**

The Virginia Veterans Care Center strives to maintain consistent staffing levels in order to provide continuity and proper care to the veterans served. However, the care center faces four challenges in recruiting and retaining the workforce needed for the continued delivery of the highest levels of health care:

The VVCC must compete with local hospitals and long-term care facilities for the support staff and nursing staff needed to care for residents. Competition in the area of wages, benefits, and working conditions for all staff in health care is especially strong, given the adjacent VA Medical Center and the close proximity of area hospitals and other long term care facilities. This environment exacerbates the problem of nursing recruitment and retention, as the nationwide pool of licensed nurses is dwindling.

The VVCC must cope with high levels of staff turnover in some sections. Job functions with significantly high annual turnover rates are:

- Certified Nursing Assistants – 39%
- Licensed Practical Nurses – 53%
- Dietary Staff – 40%
- Housekeeping Staff – 96%

Care Center staff members have accumulated significant balances of compensatory time and over-time, costing the VVCC \$52,800 in compensatory time payments and \$198,600 in over-time payments in FY05 for the four high-turnover job functions identified above.

Difficulties in recruiting and retention have forced a reliance on the utilization of employees of temporary staffing agencies

The department believes that current staffing authorization levels are simply inadequate to support the continued delivery of quality health care. The department took over direct operation of the VVCC in 2003. Prior to this time, the facility was operated by a series of contractors. Operations, management, and human resource knowledge gained during the two years of state management point to the need to increase the VVCC's full-time equivalent (FTE) employee authorization level by 29 FTEs, from 225 to 254, as follows:

- Certified Nursing Assistants: increase of 25 positions (includes students)
- Licensed Practical Nurses – increase of 2 positions
- Dietary Aide – increase of 1 position
- Housekeeper – increase of 1 position

An example of the staffing problem can be illustrated by the problem of recruiting and retaining Certified Nursing Assistants. The VVCC is certified by the Commonwealth to conduct Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training classes, which in the past has provided the facility with well-trained caregivers. However, the currently authorized FTE level prohibits the VVCC from conducting these classes because there are no available FTE positions for the students. Increasing the VVCC's FTE authorization would allow CNA training classes to be held, improving the department's ability to recruit qualified staff.

- Case Management Services for Veterans Benefits

# **Agency Strategic Plan**

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Declining potential customer base: Due to deaths of World War II and Korean War veterans and their dependents, the potential customer base is declining

Inexperienced Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs): The department is facing the challenge of training and monitoring 14 newly-hired VSRs in 2005: eight hired to fill vacant positions and six hired to fill newly created positions. While the department's new-VSR training program will help prepare the new VSRs for field office duty, it is expected that at least a year will pass before the new VSRs become proficient in their new positions

Aging workforce: DVS has twelve VSRs and two administrative employees who will be eligible to retire within 10 years. Four VSRs are eligible to retire now

Inadequate support staff in the Roanoke Benefits Services office due to past budget reductions

Lack of administrative support in eight field offices

Insufficient number of regional managers/claims examiners to handle appeals and other responsibilities

Difficulty attracting and retaining personnel in the Northern Virginia Area due to low salaries

"All Paper" office environment: The use of paper files in the verification of information, development of claims, and the filing of reports is difficult and time consuming

Limited public awareness of the positive impact the VWOEP makes in the lives of eligible students and their families, and to the Commonwealth

- **Administrative and Support Services**

The department lacks the internal automated systems needed to facilitate the processing of data and to streamline operations. This results in time-consuming efforts to gather information for agency planning purposes, to prepare required reports, and to process financial transactions. Further negative impacts include duplication of effort and an increased error/omission rate. The department is researching options to improve data processing operations, including the purchase of an automated financial management system.

- **State Veterans Cemetery Management and Operations**

The interment is the most important function carried out in the cemetery. The period of time between the arrival of a funeral procession at the cemetery gate until the time the last member of a funeral party has left the cemetery is viewed by cemetery employees as the most important time of the day. It is the time when cemetery employees must display the highest degree of compassion and concern, especially while in the presence of the family and friends. It is during this time that the physical and emotional strain of family members and friends is at its highest peak. To this end, it is imperative that cemetery employees do all that they can to ensure that each interment is conducted with maximum efficiency, without sacrificing any of the dignity and reverence that must be accorded during these services. A dignified and reverent service helps begin the healing process, and often forms a lasting impression in the minds of the deceased's friends and family.

Factors that impact the ability of cemetery employees to provide the highest degree of products and services are:

(Positive Impacts)

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- Staffing

Cemetery employees generally fill one of three roles, supplemented by inmate labor:

**Administrative:** these employees manage cemetery operations, to include making funeral arrangements, greeting arriving funeral parties, etc. Administrative employees include the Cemetery Superintendent, responsible for all facets of cemetery operations

**Grounds maintenance:** these employees handle the physical activities associated with opening and closing gravesites and maintain the grounds and physical plant of the cemetery

**Vehicle and equipment mechanic:** handled by groundskeepers at smaller cemeteries, a dedicated vehicle and equipment mechanic is needed when the number of burials per year exceeds 300

In addition, inmates from local correctional facilities supplement cemetery groundskeepers. Though not without problems (discussed below), inmate labor provides a low-cost labor source for basic grounds maintenance

Maintenance of adequate staffing levels directly impacts customer service and the overall appearance to the cemetery. Staffing levels are determined by numerous factors, the most important of which is the number of interments conducted per year

Listed below are the staffing levels the department believes necessary to operate each of Virginia's veterans cemeteries, based on the number of burials per year. The staffing levels were derived from a combination of sources, including experience at Virginia's two state-operated veterans cemeteries, staffing levels at national cemeteries, and staffing levels at civilian cemeteries with workloads similar to Virginia's veterans cemeteries:

0 – 100 burials per year: 1.5 administrative employees, 2 groundskeepers, and 4 inmate laborers  
101 – 200 burials per year: 1.5 administrative employees, 2.5 groundskeepers, and 4 inmate laborers  
201 – 300 burials per year: 2 administrative employees, 3.5 groundskeepers, and 4 inmate laborers  
301 – 400 burials per year: 2 administrative employees, 4 groundskeepers, 1 mechanic, and 4 inmate laborers  
401 – 500 burials per year: 2.5 administrative employees, 5 groundskeepers, 1 mechanic, and 4 inmate laborers  
501 – 600 burials per year: 3 administrative employees, 5.5 groundskeepers, 1 mechanic, and 4 inmate laborers

NOTE: Not included in the numbers above is the Cemetery Administrator, who provides leadership and management to both cemeteries

NOTE: A full-time employee is one who works 40 or more hours per week. A part-time employee (identified by a ".5" above) is one who works 22 to 28 hours per week

NOTE: While some manual labor is performed by inmates (sometimes referred to as detainees) of state correctional facilities, use of inmate labor is not without problems. Although a valuable part of the team, inmate labor can be somewhat unpredictable and unreliable from day to day, as the working members of the inmate labor team can change without notice. Cemetery personnel must expend considerable time explaining the tasks to be performed on any given day, instructing inmate laborers in the operation of cemetery equipment, etc. Despite these challenges, the inmate workforce has provided Virginia's veterans cemeteries with the means to complete grounds maintenance tasks in a timely manner

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- Budgeting – an adequate budget allows for the:

Management of a phased replacement program for grounds maintenance equipment. Old and worn out equipment would be replaced in a timely fashion

Management of a phased replacement program for building furnishings and office equipment

Procurement of new and up to date maintenance equipment, building furnishings and office equipment

Proper maintenance of cemetery grounds through over seeding, fertilization, and weed control on a bi-annual basis

Provision of periodic pay raises for cemetery employees, helping the cemeteries to attract and retain an able workforce

Creation of an advertising campaign in order to reach a greater number of veterans. Such efforts would help to offset the efforts of private cemeteries to sell gravesite spaces to veterans who are unaware of their right to a free burial in a veterans cemetery. These veterans are generally aged 25 to 50 and do not belong to a veterans groups, which might have provided them with information about burial in a veterans cemetery

- Other resources

Volunteer assistance: Local veterans, citizens, and veterans service organizations give selflessly of their time to assist in many facets of cemetery operations, from manning information displays to comforting families in their time of grief to organizing ceremonies on Memorial Day and Veterans Day. Veterans groups and individuals have also donated such items as benches, improving the overall appearance of the cemeteries

Local funeral homes: Cemetery personnel work with local funeral directors to help ensure that veterans and their families receive the information needed to contact either of Virginia's veterans cemetery in their time of need

Local veterans and local chapters of veterans service organizations: These individuals and groups put out a very large amount of information about cemetery benefits

Local newspapers: One of the best sources for getting cemetery information out to the public is through local newspapers. Between December 2004 and May 2005, local papers published five articles about the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery

(Negative Impacts)

Adverse Weather Conditions have the potential to severely impact cemetery operations by:

Impacting the ability of cemetery staff to safely reach the cemetery

Impacting the ability of funeral parties to safely reach the cemetery

Bringing the possibility of a loss of power or telephone service

Making it difficult to conduct scheduled funeral services due to winter ice and snow. Such conditions



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also raise the risk of injuries caused by slips and falls, with the attendant risk of liability lawsuits

Burial and ground maintenance operations at the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery are dependent on the use of inmate labor. Although the use of such labor has saved the state some money by delaying the need to hire additional full-time grounds staff, the use of inmate labor presents cemetery managers with many problems, including:

**A limited work day:** Inmates work a maximum of five hours per day at the cemetery. Though an inmate work day may be nine hours long, travel to and from the cemetery consumes at least three hours, and inmates receive an hour break for lunch, leaving five hours or less to perform grounds maintenance operations and to assist cemetery staff in preparing for funeral services. The shortened work day thus limits the number of funeral services that may be performed per day and impacts the appearance of the cemetery

**Adverse weather conditions (snow and heavy rain):** On occasion, adverse weather has caused the detainees to arrive at the cemetery late, or not to arrive at all, due to poor road conditions. If this happens, a funeral service may have to be delayed or canceled, a situation that embarrasses cemetery employees and almost certainly adds to the grief of the funeral party

**Short work (rotation) cycle:** On average, detainee work crews are on site only two to three months before they are replaced by a new work crew. This short work cycle means that cemetery employees must continuously train new detainees in cemetery operations, and must continuously monitor detainee performance. With such a short work cycle, detainees rarely develop the skill level needed to work without the supervision of cemetery personnel. This means that the cemetery's appearance is never quite as "sharp" as would be possible with more full-time groundskeepers

- **Pre-planning**

Pre-planning for burial involves the purchase of a cemetery burial plot in advance of one's death (or in advance of the death of a family member). Privately owned/operated cemeteries have for years employed a sales and telemarketing staff simply to pre-sell cemetery burial plots

This practice continues, though it has slowed considerably over the last year because of the rules governing telemarketing

Many World War II and Korean War-era veterans residing in the cemetery service areas have already completed their pre-planned funeral arrangements with privately owned/operated cemeteries

To better attract customers in future years, Virginia's veterans cemeteries must focus marketing efforts not only on older veterans, but on younger veterans as well, in order to make these veterans aware of the benefits offered by Virginia's veterans cemeteries before they opt to pre-purchase a plot in a privately owned/operated cemetery

- **Location versus Population**

Choosing a site on which to build a new veterans cemetery is dependent on many factors, including the identification of a suitable and affordable site, the current state budget climate, and the number of eligible veterans residing within 75 miles of the proposed location. All but a small portion of a veterans cemetery's operating budget comes from the state or federal government, and decision makers are understandably reluctant to build a veterans cemetery in areas with very a very small veterans population

Virginia's veterans cemeteries are well sited to serve the concentrations of veterans in central and

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southeast Virginia. Many military members choose to retire near military bases in order to take advantage of health care, commissary, and base exchange facilities. The Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery, in Suffolk, is in close proximity to the Navy, Air Force, and Army bases in the Tidewater region and thus has a large veteran and retire population on which to draw

The lack of a state or national veterans cemetery within a 75-mile drive of veterans in Southwest Virginia impacts the ability of the department to veterans living in this part of the Commonwealth

### **Anticipated Changes in Agency Products and Services**

- **Education Program Certification for Veterans**

Improve outreach by developing a new database system available online; this would increase productivity of the SAA staff by ensuring timely entry of data and would allow the SAA to better serve its customers

The department will request funding and position authorization to hire two new educational specialists in FY07

- **Case Management Services for Veterans Benefits**

Development and launch of a "benefits awareness" program

Additional travel to itinerant service points to improve access to DVS services

Conversion of paper claims files to electronic files, supported by an effective database, to assist with the production of internal and external reports

Strengthened administrative support in field offices

Establishment of an ongoing/refresher training program for VSRs

Improved functionality and appearance of DVS field offices

Heightened awareness and recognition of the Virginia War Orphan Education Program

- **Administrative and Support Services**

The services provided by the Administrative Services section will expand in the next four to six years. A new 160-bed veterans care center will open in 2007, and plans for an additional veterans care center and cemetery will impact service delivery. The section's staffing level will need to be augmented to meet the additional demand for services, or other means of service delivery will need to be explored.

- **State Veterans Cemetery Management and Operations**

Funds have been requested through the capital budget process for the construction of a second committal shelter at the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in FY09. A second committal shelter would allow concurrent memorial services to be conducted. In conjunction with the hiring of additional groundskeepers, a mechanic, a part-time administrative assistant, and a cemetery superintendent, a second committal shelter would greatly expand the service capabilities of the Horton cemetery

Funds have been requested through the capital budget process for the construction of a third state-operated veterans cemetery in Southwest Virginia in FY09. If constructed in the Dublin area, this cemetery would have the capability of serving a veteran population of approximately 65,000

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The department will hire an additional full-time groundskeeper in FY06 for the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery. This will allow the cemetery to better serve Virginia's veterans by providing a greater "window of opportunity" in which burials may be scheduled. This means that the cemetery will be able to start burials earlier each morning and close burial sites later each day

Because the department believes that the number of burials conducted each year at the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery will continue to grow as a result of increased advertising and a rising veteran death rate, the department will request the funds and position authorization to hire additional groundskeepers and a mechanic in FY07

The department will request the funds and position authorization to hire a full-time cemetery superintendent and a part-time administrative assistant at the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in FY07. The department will also request the funds and position authorization to convert the part-time administrative assistant position at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery to full-time status in FY07. The new positions are needed to manage the increasing burial rate at both cemeteries, to coordinate funeral operations, to assist veterans who visit the cemetery seeking information, and to complete the myriad of administrative tasks that come from managing a growing operation. As with the hiring of additional grounds staff and the construction of a second committal shelter at the Horton cemetery, a cemetery superintendent and additional administrative staff will improve the capacity of the cemeteries to serve Virginia's veterans

The department will redouble its efforts to inform Virginia's veterans of the burial benefits offered by the cemeteries. Marketing efforts will include, but are not limited to:

Increased contact with the directors of local funeral home

Regular visits to the local chapters of veterans service organizations to distribute cemetery brochures and pre-applications

Contact with churches and other places of worship in order to reach the significant percentage of veterans who are members of a church congregation

Distribution of cemetery brochures to local barbershops and beauty parlors. Experience in other states and inquiries from local barbershops and beauty salons would seem to indicate that this is a good channel in which to reach veterans

Participation in Supermarket of Veterans Benefits and similar events, in order to get the word out to veterans who may have not otherwise have been aware of their burial/cemetery benefits

Advertising in local newspapers. The department will request funds to purchase advertising space in the obituary section of local newspapers

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### **Agency Financial Resources Summary:**

The department's funding comes from a variety of general and non-general fund sources:

General funds cover all expenses for the Benefit Services section and pay part of the operating costs for the Cemetery Services and Administrative Services sections.

Federal funds cover all expenses of the State Approving Agency for Veterans Education and pay part of the operating costs for Cemetery Services, Care Center Services, and Administrative Services sections.

Other state funds, in the form of Medicaid payments, pay part of the operating cost of the Care Center Services section.

Finally, the Cemetery Services and Care Center Services sections rely on private funds for a portion of their operating costs.

	<b><u>Fiscal Year 2007</u></b>		<b><u>Fiscal Year 2008</u></b>	
	<b>General Fund</b>	<b>Nongeneral Fund</b>	<b>General Fund</b>	<b>Nongeneral Fund</b>
<b>Base Budget</b>	\$3,568,102	\$14,256,630	\$3,568,102	\$14,256,630
<b>Changes To Base</b>	\$121,868	\$885,760	\$121,868	\$880,760
<b>AGENCY TOTAL</b>	<b>\$3,689,970</b>	<b>\$15,142,390</b>	<b>\$3,689,970</b>	<b>\$15,137,390</b>

### **Agency Human Resources Summary:**

#### **Human Resources Overview**

As of July 15, 2005, DVS has an authorized full-time equivalent (FTE) employee level of 307 positions, with 283 positions currently filled and 24 vacancies. DVS has a headquarters/administrative offices in Richmond and Roanoke, a Care Center in Roanoke, Cemeteries in Amelia and Suffolk, and Benefit field offices in Accomac, Big Stone Gap, Bristol, Charlottesville, Cedar Bluff, Front Royal, Hampton, Lynchburg, Norfolk, Quantico, Richmond, Roanoke, South Hill, Staunton, Washington D.C., and Wytheville. DVS will open field offices in Alexandria, Chester, Fairfax, Norfolk, and Portsmouth in FY06, and will open a field office in Danville in FY06 or FY07. The offices of the State Approving Agency for Veterans Education are located in Richmond.

Three employees work in the Richmond headquarters office, while 15 perform leadership and administrative functions in Roanoke. The Virginia Veterans Care Center accounts for 210 employees, while 9 employees work at the two veterans cemeteries. Six employees work in the State Approving Agency for Veterans Education, and 41 (soon to be 47) employees are scattered across the Commonwealth at the 15 (soon to be 21) field offices.

The Department of Veterans Services operates from a combination of salaried and wage employees spread across all service areas. The largest population of employees resides with the care center service area. While employment levels remain stable in the other service areas – benefit services, cemetery services, veterans education approval, and administrative services – the greatest challenge to the department is the high turnover of care center staff in the nursing, dietary, and housekeeping areas of operations. Also of great concern is the fact that 32% of the employees in the benefit services section are approaching retirement eligibility.

The Virginia Veterans Care Center strives to maintain consistent staffing levels in order to provide continuity and proper care to the veterans served. Therefore, the facility must compete for the support staff and nursing staff needed to care for residents. Competition in the area of wages, benefits, and

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working conditions for all staff in health care is especially strong, given the adjacent VA Medical Center and the close proximity of area hospitals and other long term care facilities.

Maintaining employment levels for benefits services does not present a significant concern until factors such as age and length of service place employees in the position to retire from state service. At present, 13 of 41 employees assigned to benefit services are eligible to retire. This is the continuation of a recent trend, wherein several Veteran Service Representatives (VSRs) retired in the past year. As replacement staff is hired, the retirement trend should level out over the next two to three years.

However, training new employees in the myriad of United States Department of Veterans Affairs laws and regulations governing veterans benefits programs is a challenge, not only for an adequate program to provide the training, but also in fiscal and human resources available to provide the training.

### Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Position Summary

Effective Date:	7/1/2005
Total Authorized Position level .....	307
Vacant Positions .....	24
Non-Classified (Filled).....	3
Full-Time Classified (Filled) .....	280
Part-Time Classified (Filled) .....	0
Faculty (Filled) .....	0
Wage .....	42
Contract Employees .....	0
Total Human Resource Level .....	325

### Factors Impacting Human Resources

High turnover rate for support and health care staff for Care Center operations continues to threaten continuity of care. Due to competition factors, this could result in higher starting pay and other monetary incentives to retain a well-qualified work force.

Anticipated large turnover of benefits staff over the next year due to retirement will impact on service delivery to Virginia's veterans and their families. Training in laws and regulations governing veterans' benefits will be required, and will take a significant amount of time to bring new hires to the skill level of those retiring from service.

Burial rate at both veterans' cemeteries may require additional staff to meet the demand. The burial rate at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery has been erratic over its 8-year operating life. However, during the past several years, burials have been increasing at the rate of approximately 5%. The original burial projections for the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery were lower than actual burials. In less than seven months of operation, there have been 255 burials at this cemetery, which averages at 32 per month. Start up funding provided FTE based on a lower level of activity.

### Anticipated Changes in Human Resources

Over the next six years, plans for additional veterans care facilities and cemeteries will result in the need to reassess employee numbers and skill levels. Additional funding will be required for increased staffing levels to include but not limited to salary and benefits costs. Training and orientation will be required which also requires funding.

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### **Agency Information Technology Summary:**

#### **Current State / Issues**

While DVS generally has the information technology systems it needs to support current operations, DVS IT needs have historically been considered on an “as needed” basis – with each service delivery section selecting or developing IT systems and solutions to meet section-specific needs as they arose – rather than having been considered on an agency-wide (or enterprise-wide) basis and in a systematic, planned matter. This piecemeal approach can be explained by the recent history of the agency, which was consolidated only in 2003, and by the disparate nature of the department’s service-delivery sections, which, while focused on serving veterans, delivery services in very unique ways, requiring unique IT systems.

DVS does not have a robust in-house custom application development capability to meet business needs. Application development is out-sourced for unique or proprietary applications or performed by VITA. DVS has developed a Representatives Veterans claims database in Access 2003 that DVS claims staff uses to meet electronic claims tracking and for reporting purposes. DVS must maintain other critical applications as information technology hardware and software and management of technology changes.

DVS administrative IT applications are not integrated. The accounting, payroll, procurement, asset control and human resources functions all use stand-alone systems, requiring duplicate, manual keying to transfer data between systems.

Effective support of DVS operations is hampered by distance, with the two-person IT staff being required to provide systems administration, operations management, and technical support to the Richmond and Roanoke headquarters/administrative offices, 15 (soon to be 21) benefit field offices, two cemeteries, the State Approving Agency for Veterans Education, and the Virginia Veterans Care Center. While the DVS IT staff provides outstanding service, timely response to IT problems can sometimes be difficult because field operations are scattered across the Commonwealth. For example, the driving distance between the field offices in Accomac and Big Stone Gap is 531 miles, making “same day service” by department IT employees impracticable. Where possible, DVS relies on support from the Virginia Information Technology Agency (VITA) to meet urgent IT needs, but routine IT service requires extensive travel by department employees.

The DVS IT office has the extensive responsibility of providing systems administration, operations management, and technical support for the Richmond and Roanoke headquarters/administrative offices, 15 (soon to be 21) benefit field offices, two cemeteries, the State Approving Agency for Veterans Education, and the Virginia Veterans Care Center. The IT office manages all technology functions that support the agency in the accomplishment of its mission. With the scheduled opening of the Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center in early 2007, the responsibilities of the DVS IT office will grow considerable. On the horizon, the department’s 2006-2012 Capital Budget request calls for the construction of a state-operated veterans cemetery in Southwest Virginia in the 2008-2010 biennium and a veterans care center in Hampton Roads in the 2010-2012 biennium, adding additional responsibilities to the DVS IT office. Expanded operations to include telecommunications, equipment and numerous software applications and data integrity are critical to the agency being able to meet its management and technical support responsibilities.

The Department of Veterans Services (DVS) works closely with the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to serve Virginia’s veterans. A primary IT modernization goal of DVS is to improve service to veterans by utilizing current information technology to enhance claims processing, both internally and with the VBA.

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### Factor Impacting Information Technology

Efforts to advertise DVS services and activities via the Internet are hampered because DVS does not employ a full-time Webmaster. The DVS website was built and managed by a DVS employee, no longer with the agency, after working hours. DVS is exploring solutions to remedy this problem.

Changes determined by VITA conversion actions may change the department's ability to serve external agency and internal IT staff. This is likely to increase agency overhead costs to meet the conversion mandates.

The department hopes to transact more business with citizens across automated systems (electronic government) if such systems become available. Such transactions would require DVS to purchase the necessary hardware and software to implement e-government solutions, and may require the hiring of additional IT staff of support such operations.

The department continues to update current information technology systems in an effort to keep up with current technological trends and to continue providing high quality service. DVS employees working at the 15 field offices have been granted access to the USDVA's "One VA VPN" service. This service allows out-based users the ability to securely connect to available remote VA applications by use of their own ISP via VPN. This access method also allows DVS to utilize the VBA Terminal Server. In addition, department employees at the Roanoke headquarters office have access to the Automated Reference Materials System, which includes VBA circulars, manuals, handbooks, and other reference materials such as Title 38 Code of Federal Regulations and Court of Veterans Appeals documents. DVS Field Office employees have access to the web-based version of Web Automated Reference Materials System. This method has improved service to clients by enhancing claims processing both internal to the agency and with the VBA. This system access for DVS remote sites has dramatically increased the quality and availability of information for agents and their staff providing services to Virginia's veterans and their families.

DVS is part of the Commonwealth's implementation of VITA's Standardization and Optimization to meet requirements and recommendations on an ongoing basis. This may require replacing the agency's Novell Systems in the future.

DVS staff can now dial into the Vita Customer Care Center for minor support if on-site VITA employee is not available. DVS also utilizes VITA technical assistance for various applications at a low hourly rate.

### Anticipated Changes / Desired State

The department's ultimate goal is to fully implement and maintain comprehensive web-based and laptop applications, especially the veterans claims database. DVS plans to move to "Shared Email" to be maintained by VITA, and to use the Web Application Development Services.

DVS also needs to expand its electronic-government systems to include the ERP and SAPP programs for procurement and financial electronic transaction capabilities.

### Agency Information Technology Investments:

	<u>Cost-Fiscal Year 2007</u>		<u>Cost-Fiscal Year 2008</u>	
	General Fund	Nongeneral Fund	General Fund	Nongeneral Fund
Major IT Projects	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Non-Major IT Projects	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Major IT Procurements	\$75,000	\$99,500	\$0	\$110,000
Non-Major IT Procurements	\$55,000	\$0	\$25,000	\$30,000
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$130,000</b>	<b>\$99,500</b>	<b>\$25,000</b>	<b>\$140,000</b>

# Agency Strategic Plan

## Department of Veterans' Services

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### **Agency Capital Investments Summary:**

#### **Current State / Issues**

While the Commonwealth does not own any of the 15 field offices, the state does own the Virginia Veterans Cemetery at Amelia, the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery at Suffolk, and the Virginia Veterans Care Center in Roanoke. These facilities require ongoing maintenance funds to replace or update systems and facility components.

#### **Factors Impacting Capital Investments**

DVS will need to meet maintenance standards to maintain its facilities in peak condition to meet all safety and handicap access requirements and standards.

#### **Capital Investment Alignment**

The Commissioner of Veterans Services is required by statute to maintain an office in the vicinity of the Capitol. The offices of the Chief Deputy Commissioner are located in the Poff Federal Building in Roanoke, adjacent to the USDVA Regional Office. The department operates 15 field offices, two cemeteries, and one care center in various locations across the Commonwealth.

DVS will strive to maintain field offices, cemeteries, and care centers in locations that provide convenient access to the greatest number of veterans. Veterans care centers and cemeteries must be proximate to a sufficiently large population to support cost-effective operations.

## Agency Goals

### **Goal #1:**

#### ***Strengthen outreach and marketing efforts***

##### **Goal Summary and Alignment:**

By strengthening outreach and marketing efforts, more of Virginia's veterans will be aware of the veterans services offered by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. This will increase the utilization of these services, which will in turn lead to improved levels of economic well being, health, or education.

##### **Statewide Goals Supported by Goal #1**

- Be a national leader in the preservation and enhancement of our economy.
- Engage and inform citizens to ensure we serve their interests.
- Be recognized as the best-managed state in the nation.

### **Goal #2:**

#### ***Improve access to veterans services***

##### **Goal Summary and Alignment:**

By improving access to veterans services, more of Virginia's veterans will be able to take advantage of the veterans services offered by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. This will increase the utilization of these services, which will in turn lead to improved levels of economic well being, health, or education.



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### **Statewide Goals Supported by Goal #2**

- Be a national leader in the preservation and enhancement of our economy.
- Engage and inform citizens to ensure we serve their interests.
- Be recognized as the best-managed state in the nation.

### **Goal #3:**

#### ***Maximize flow of federal dollars to meet the needs of Virginia's veterans***

##### **Goal Summary and Alignment:**

By maximizing the flow of federal dollars to meet the needs of Virginia's veterans, more of Virginia's veterans will be able to take advantage of the veterans services offered by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. This will increase the utilization of these services, which will in turn lead to improved levels of economic well being, health, or education.

### **Statewide Goals Supported by Goal #3**

- Be a national leader in the preservation and enhancement of our economy.
- Engage and inform citizens to ensure we serve their interests.
- Be recognized as the best-managed state in the nation.

### **Goal #4:**

#### ***Make Virginia an even more attractive place for military retirees by delivering top-quality veterans services***

##### **Goal Summary and Alignment:**

By delivering top-quality veterans services, military retirees will be enticed to choose the Commonwealth as their retirement destination.

### **Statewide Goals Supported by Goal #4**

- Be a national leader in the preservation and enhancement of our economy.
- Engage and inform citizens to ensure we serve their interests.
- Be recognized as the best-managed state in the nation.

### **Goal #5:**

#### ***Improve the effectiveness, accuracy, and accountability of administrative services***

##### **Goal Summary and Alignment:**

By improving the effectiveness, accuracy, and accountability of Administrative Services, the department will benefit from sound financial and human resource data for future planning.

### **Statewide Goals Supported by Goal #5**

- Be recognized as the best-managed state in the nation.